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# PANAMA GETS IT!

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When public officials don't recognize the economic value of recreational fishing, they:

zone sport fishermen off the water along much of the California coast;

attempt to end requirements for fishing licenses in various states, including Florida;

allow trawlers to waste thousands of striped bass off North Carolina;

propose highly restrictive limits for pelagic species with no scientific evidence of need.

For those of us who understand the importance that recreational fishing plays in this country — socially, culturally and economically — examples like these remind us that there are many powerful people in this country who just don't get it.

So it came as a breath of fresh air to read the recent public comments of officials who do.

"Market research shows that a tourist destination that has reduced overfishing and put in place sound conservation regulations on sport fishing increases the probability that a traveling angler will choose that destination.

"The international market for eco-tourism is rapidly expanding and seeking new destinations, particularly in the area of sport fishing. To capitalize on the economic benefits that follow strong ecotourism, we must have abundant fish and wildlife. If properly managed, these changes will create new, lasting jobs that are well paying."

Those are but a few of the comments from a recent statement written by two high-ranking Panamanian officials to announce a new sport-fishing study, in cooperation with The Billfish Foundation, aimed at assessing and effectively managing Panama's marine resources. According to the officials, Dr. Ruben Berrocal (national secretary of science, technology and innovation) and Salomon Shamah (minister of tourism), a primary objective of this study will be to preserve, enhance and market the fabulous sport fishing off the country's coasts.

When I use the word "fabulous," I'm not simply borrowing someone else's term. I've been fortunate

enough to fish Panama off the Atlantic twice and several times along the Pacific. Inevitably, in my position, I'm asked, "Where's the best fishing in the world?" I can't answer with one spot but typically offer a few that come to mind, and *always* Panama is in top-of-the-list territory. Aside from its wide-open fishing, the country is visitor friendly and close by (less than three hours from Miami).

In recent months, Panama has announced new laws prohibiting purse-seining and industrial longlining. Now, on the heels of those decisions, comes word of this new study aimed at

protecting Panama's world-class recreational fisheries. That is gratifying news.

While acknowledging the importance of continuing to harvest "safe and healthy seafood," Berrocal and Shamah cite a particular need to "drastically increase the amount of low-impact tourism." Going one step beyond, they write: "It has been scientifically proved that being conscientious stewards of fisheries through conservation programs like those advocated by the sport-fishing industry actually increases the quality and quantity of commercial harvests over time. A robust and responsible sport-fishing industry is in Panama's long-term interest."

How different is their awareness from that of some honchos in the Pew Foundation, who are working actively to close the entire vast Coral Sea off Australia to all sport fishing.

When it comes to understanding the nature and value of recreational fishing, Pew in Australia is clueless. Many individuals/entities in this country, as noted at the start of this editorial, advocate action that would set back the sport. They too are clueless.

Panama, on the other hand, *gets it*.

I wish these officials and their country nothing but the best of luck and certainly advocate that those who can do so should support the country's bold new efforts: *Go fish Panama*. Now there's a win-win for you!



## A primary objective



*Handwritten signature of Doug Olander.*

FAHA REG # 0020

Good afternoon, from Panama and the president of Panama, Ricardo Martinelli, who would like to extend his support and commitment to the medical tourism industry and to the Medical Tourism Association's mission on behalf of this emerging industry.

It is Panama's commitment to raise and maintain the standards of medical and dental care for patients seeking transparency, quality care, and quality service at affordable cost in the rapidly growing global economy. It is also our commitment to provide our institutions with state-of-the-art equipment, technology, and infrastructure. This is a very ambitious vision and commitment from a country about the size of South Carolina and a population of 3.5 million (about a million more than the City of Chicago).

Panama's pursuit of ambitious projects has a long history, dating back to 1855 with the construction of the trans-isthmus railroad. From 1880 to 1904, the French attempted the construction of the Panama Canal, but failed due to yellow fever and malaria resulting in the loss of 22,000 workers' lives. In 1904, the U.S. took over the construction of the canal. They prioritized public health and tropical medicine. As a result, they eradicated yellow fever and contained malaria, a legacy that remains to this day. This bold health care initiative allowed for

the Panama Canal's completion in 1914, establishing Panama's destiny as a hub of world commerce.

Now, with the expansion of the canal to be completed in 2014 on its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we will usher in new era of competitiveness by doubling our annual shipping capacities. This will allow Panama to be even more competitive in the global marketplace.

We continue to lead our region toward a better tomorrow and forge paths that underscore our nation's visionary heritage. We truly believe that Panama has an important role to play in this effort. And we are ready to meet this challenge.

Many at this convention offer quality care at low cost. I'm here to tell you Panama goes beyond that. Panama provides foreign patients with a comprehensive healing experience because of our value-added environment including:

- Safety and security: Panama City is one of the safest major cities in the Americas.
- We have political stability and democratic institutions.
- Panama enjoys economic stability: We have a dollarized economy with no exchange rate or other monetary inconveniences. Along with Peru, Mexico,

Brazil and Chile, we have been given an investment-grade bond rating -- the only nations in Latin America that can claim this distinction. We have rock solid financial and business institutions, weathering much of the global economic storms of recent years; and we are currently experiencing nearly 10% growth this year.

- Cosmopolitan city infrastructure (malls, restaurants, casinos): We will soon have the first metro system in Central America.
- Connectivity with 80 international flights daily, including 20 from major U.S. cities. We are expanding our primary international airport and are in the process of building two more international airports.
- Minimal cultural and language barriers: English is spoken widely throughout the country.
- Finally, Panamanian medical and dental system offers 40% – 70% lower cost for similar surgeries in the U.S. and most U.S. insurance policies are widely accepted in our country.

Medical tourism in Panama is a growing industry. Today, I want to give you an overview on how the Panamanian government is creating conditions for a world-class medical tourism industry. Central in our minds is the fact that we are dealing with human



lives. Therefore, quality care and quality service should never be compromised. As a government, we have three primary objectives: 1) Creating legislation and entities that will ensure quality care. 2) Strengthening and ensuring the competency of our health-care professionals. 3) Promoting institutional international accreditation.

In regards to creating legislation and entities that will ensure quality care, we at the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation are spearheading the legislation that will responsibly regulate the development of this growing industry. Currently, several of our government institutions are supporting reputable private medical tourism ventures with federal funding. We aim to formally establish licensing and funding criteria with legislation that will reflect our commitment to excellence and will assure the best possible care for our medical tourists. This law specifies standards of excellence in out patient care, hospital care, and after-care facilities.

In the legislation, we are ALSO creating special medical parks/districts or zones comprised of hospitals, medical research centers, and their complementary services. In these specific, qualified medical areas, international scientists, physicians, and investors will be able to collaborate in joint

venture activities and will be provided with generous tax incentives for these investments.

Our second priority is to have the best-trained medical and support staff in the region. So, included in our initiatives is the establishment of a national committee of ethics and certification. We aspire to create conditions that attract and retain the most qualified and ethical health care professionals and institutions in the world. This committee will be comprised of upstanding representatives of the scientific and medical community, service industry, and associated government institutions. We seek consensus with all the sectors involved in this field. Additionally, it is our goal to maintain the quality and competency of our nurses, doctors, and health care providers through continuing education programs. We currently collaborate with several medical and scientific programs and universities around the world.

Finally, our ultimate goal is to make a globally recognized accreditation, such as Joint Commission International, a prerequisite to obtain the endorsement for treating medical tourists. Along these same lines, the role of the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation is to foster strategic medical and scientific partnerships locally and internationally and have participatory involvement in the supervision of medical tourism policies.

In conclusion, we believe that responsible industry regulation; well-trained and certified health-care professionals and accredited institutions are non-negotiable virtues when providing for the medical tourism industry. They are solid pillars on which to promote quality medical care to the foreign and local market at lower costs. Being treated in Panama allows you convenient, hassle-free, world-class medical care in one of the safest places in Latin America: The Republic of Panama.

## Introduction

# Panama: Forging a Path Toward International Science Hub by Dr. Ruben Berrocal



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I am delighted to write an introduction to this supplemental issue of the Journal of Alzheimer's Disease (JAD).

As JAD continues to serve as one of the most prolific, highly cited, and recognized publications on Alzheimer's and neurodegenerative diseases, I am pleased to share with you some of our perspectives and developments in this important field of study and where Panama might offer solutions.

While we witness exciting breakthroughs in fighting neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases, more must be done. Perhaps now more than ever, it is critical we continue apace to eradicate these diseases through new discoveries and novel methods.

Currently, innovations are being sought to find new pathways to a cure. Research on new drug discoveries has shifted focus to the natural world and the critical need to develop biomarkers that can distinguish the normal aging processes from neurodegeneration and

other dementias. These findings should prove invaluable to early diagnosis of these diseases – the first line of defense.

In this area, Panama can offer new hope in groundbreaking research and drug developments. In what a recent article in *Nature*, one of the world's most cited scientific journals, referred to as Panama's "big ambition" in the moment of our "scientific renaissance," we are forging a new direction in drug discoveries, clinical trials and research incubators.<sup>1</sup>

Under President Ricardo Martinelli's leadership, we are aiming high, seeking to become an international hub for science and technology; and be among the leaders in bioscience and biomedicine in our hemisphere. Our rich natural resources and dedicated scientists offer us a means for growth in this field that is second to none in the region.

<sup>1</sup> Dalton, R. "Panama's Big Ambition." *Nature* 27 Jan. 2011: 462–463.



Neurodegenerative diseases have a complex pathology and etiology and we do not know enough about them. For instance, we have yet to discover a cellular/animal model that accurately replicates their degenerative effects as seen in the human brain. As this field of study becomes more important given our ever-growing and aging populations, the time to find a cure is now.

Neuroscientists in Panama are working to develop cognitive, neurochemical, and imaging biomarkers to better understand degenerative diseases, as well as a comprehensive database on brain disorders. In addition, our drug discovery scientists are focusing on identifying novel molecules from marine biodiversity as neuroprotective agents.

Panama is undertaking major investments in the field of science, innovation, and technology. We have set aside more than \$50 million this year, with a plan to increase that figure to 0.5% of GDP over the next few years. We are optimistic that given this pledge, and Panama's abundant flora and fauna, we will produce vital solutions to finding new disease-modifying agents among us.

Recently, our government signed a memorandum of understanding with a leading U.S. university hospital and research facility to establish a drug discovery center in Panama. And we will continue to seek out mutually beneficial alliances to attract the best and brightest to Panama, further demonstrating our serious commitment.

Investments like these and cultivating important collaborations, will offer significant contributions that

the scientific community must make to solve the dilemmas of the 21st century. For our part, it is important that we foster a culture of competitiveness in our global economy by creating world leaders in science, innovation, and technology. This is our moment, and we are ready to rise to the occasion.

Panama has a profound understanding of what can be accomplished when collective will and ingenuity confront considerable challenges. If not for the global commitment of the brave workers and brilliant engineers who built the Panama Canal, we may have not yet discovered a vaccine for yellow fever. Without unified commitments like these, we often deprive one another of our potential.

Curing neurodegenerative disease is no less daunting a task, but we must continue to seek out new solutions to better understand it, control it, and ultimately eliminate it.

And while we will long feel the loss of one of the field's great contributors in Dr. Mark A. Smith, we must continue to pioneer great work, such as his, that pushes the boundaries of contemporary science, medicine, and conventional wisdom. In this, we find ourselves in our hour of great potential, and on the shoulders of giants.

*Dr. Ruben Berrocal is the National Secretary of Panama's Science, Innovation and Technology agency (SENACYT), and also serves as president of the Council of Ministers of Science and Technology for Latin America and the Caribbean.*